

# Become A Special Educator In Tennessee

## Feature Story

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When I graduated from Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) the first time and was able to immediately find employment, I felt very fortunate. After a few years as a newspaper reporter, I decided to do public and investor relations for a couple of decades. I often joked with my corporate colleagues that the guy in the office next to mine was in graduate school and that was as close as I would ever get to going back to college.

However, life threw a curve ball to me. After years as a workaholic, I was blessed with a marriage and a short-time later, a beautiful baby girl with Down's syndrome. I wasn't prepared for this challenge and needed to learn how to help my daughter. I decided to take a few courses and learn the best ways to teach her. The professors at MTSU were amazing, and they encouraged me to apply for Become A Special Educator in TN (BASE-TN) funding and become a special education teacher. Because of my daughter's special needs, interactions with parents of children with exceptionalities, and encouragement from my professors at MTSU, I believed I could make a difference in the lives of children with disabilities. I applied for and was awarded the BASE-TN scholarship. BASE-TN pays the tuition for the courses required to become a licensed special education teacher in Tennessee. In exchange, BASE-TN recipients must teach students with disabilities ages 0 – 21 in the State of Tennessee two years for every 30 semester hours of tuition support received.

After completion of the program, I received my license to teach special education in Tennessee. Once again, I was fortunate! I was employed immediately. Today, I am a special education teacher at Riverdale High School, one of the largest schools in Tennessee and "home of the greatest student body and faculty in the state." Also, like that guy in the office next to mine, I will be graduating from MTSU with a Master's degree in Special Education on December 19, 2009. I will always be grateful to the Division of Special Education within the Tennessee Department of Education, MTSU, my professors, my principal Tom Nolan of Rutherford County Schools, and my family for affording me the opportunity to "turn that curve ball into a homerun."